

LETTER XXXI

VAN,¹ ARMENIA, Nov.
4.

VAN and its surroundings are at once so interesting and picturesque that it is remarkable that they are comparatively seldom visited by travellers. Probably

¹ Van may be considered the capital of that part of Kurdistan which we know as Armenia, but it must be remembered that under the present Government of Turkey Armenia is a prohibited name, and has ceased to be "a geographical expression." Cyclopaedias containing articles on Armenia, and school books with any allusions to Armenian history, or to the geography of any district referred to as Armenia, are not allowed to enter Asia Minor, and no foreign maps which contain the province of Armenia are allowed to be used in the foreign schools, or even to be retained in the country. Of the four millions of the Armenian race 2,500,000 are subjects of the Sultan, and with few exceptions are distinguished for their loyalty and their devotion to peaceful pursuits.

The portion of Armenia which lies within the Turkish frontier consists for the most part of table-lands from 5000 to 6000 feet in elevation, intersected by mountain ranges and watered by several rivers, the principal of which are the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Aras. Of its many lakes the Dead Sea of Van is the principal, its dimensions being estimated at twice the area of the Lake of Geneva, and at eighty miles in length by twenty-five in breadth. From its exquisitely beautiful shores rise the two magnificent extinct volcanoes, the Sipan Dag, with an altitude of over 12,000 feet, and the Nimrud Dag, with a crater five miles in diameter and 1600 feet in depth, the top of its wall being over 9000 feet in height.

The Armenians claim an antiquity exceeding that of any other nation, and profess to trace their descent from Haik, the son of Togarmah, the grandson of Japhet, who fled from the tyranny of Belus,

King of Assyria,
into the country which in the Armenian tongue is known
by his name, as
Haikh or *Jffaizdani*. It may be said of the Armenians that
the splendour
and misery of their national history exceed those of
any other race.